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timonies of their disinterestedness—so long as reason and morality and religion hold their control over us. They are not to be forgotten so long as the records of the world shall impartially narrate the most memorable events of every age, and do justice to the evil and good of every country.

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**ART. XI.**—*Sermons by the late Rev. J. S. Buckminster ; with a memoir of his life and character.* 8vo, pp. 430, Boston, John Eliot, 1814.

It is commonly stated as one of the causes why there is produced in our country so little which deserves attention, on the score of merely literary merit, that the talent of the country is mostly turned into the channels of the active professions. This implies that there is talent existing ; and if it be just, as we believe, we may fairly expect to find compositions of professional men on subjects or occasions of a professional nature, of a high order of excellence. In the course of two of the professions and of public life, duties occur, which cannot be successfully discharged without literary accomplishments ; and the very motive, which withdraws a man from the pursuit of literature for a business, urges him to bring his speech in the church, the senate, the popular assembly, or at the bar, as near as possible to the ideal standard of their several kinds of composition. We think the experiment confirms the theory ; and that the best literary specimens we have to show are the speeches of our barristers and statemen, the lectures of our academical men, and the sermons of our divines. We have no better apology for having omitted, heretofore, to notice a work, which stands pre-eminent in the first rank of them, than that it was published before our labours began, and has uniformly, where it has been known, been held in a just estimation. We notice it now, not to dissent in any respect from the sentence, which the public has so emphatically pronounced, but because that sentence ought to be recorded. If what we say is just, it is no credit to our discrimination ; we but repeat the general voice.

The difficulty of a preacher's task, we apprehend, is imperfectly appreciated. It is understood that the subjects which he must treat have no recommendation of novelty ; but on

the other hand, it is thought that this novelty is only of consequence to a speaker, as a means of commanding interest, which interest is equally insured by the immense and eternal importance of the subjects of pulpit discourse. The course of argument it is allowed is so familiar, that the doctrine or the premises once announced, the minds of the hearers anticipate the method of proof, or arrive at the conclusion, before they are conducted to it ; but this weariness of listening is supposed to be some how compensated to the speaker, by the ready assent which his hearers are expected to grant to him. If there is necessary to him a vast knowledge of character and motives, his studies and situation put him in the way of acquiring it ; and though he must address himself to an audience comprising all varieties of information and refinement, of opinion, condition, and character, it is with topics, in the application of which, no such distinctions are to be recognized. It is thought, moreover, that he has advantages over other public speakers in these respects, that unembarrassed by the consciousness of being watched to be contradicted, he may express his thoughts with force and freedom, without those qualifications which are so hostile to the spirit of eloquence ; that the deference paid to his office, which secures for his sentiments, at least, a candid reception, and the authority not to be disputed, by which, if he understands his business, he will take care to confirm what he utters, give him confidence ; and that he is not limited by an unaccommodating subject to one style of composition or another, but may select such as will give propriety to an argumentative, a didactic, or pathetic strain, as his particular taste may dictate.

There is good sense in this, as far as it admits the difficulties which exist, but most of what is said on the other side is either not true in itself, or not true, as applied. It avails nothing, how interesting may be the subject, on which one speaks, unless its importance is felt by those who hear. It was one thing for Cicero to make a speech to the Romans, on the conspiracy of Cataline, within their walls : it would have been quite another to persuade them, that by continuing Cæsar at the head of their armies in the west, they were paving his way to the overthrow of the republic. So far is a preacher from being aided by any strong sense on the part of his hearers, of a personal concern in what he is urging on them, that he may consider his task in the main accomplished,

the moment this sense is felt. Men need direction in duty ; but they need much more to be awakened to a sense of its obligation and importance, and this is only to be done by exposing to them a thousand false views and wrong biasses, which hinder the influence on them of acknowledged truth. These can be detected only by the most laborious observation and skilful search, and then require no less ability and care to exhibit them, so that they may be recognized. The awful sanctions of another life might seem an unfailing instrument of commanding an interest. But, awful as they are, they are familiar to the ear, if not to the thought ; and it is an undertaking for the highest genius to find an avenue to the mind, where they will meet no obstacle, and may enter in all their overpowering strength.

That the subjects of pulpit discourse have, at all times, the same interest, is again an untoward circumstance to the eloquence of the pulpit. It imposes on the speaker the task of considering what he shall speak of, as well as what he shall say of it ; and the former is commonly the more embarrassing question of the two. Other public speakers are relieved of this task. The point is given ; it is for them to determine how it shall be approached. The time and spirits of the preacher must be wasted in selecting out of an innumerable variety, and very often with no principle of choice, a subject which of course will have after all no peculiar pertinency, and might as well be treated at another time as at the present. When it is chosen, his mind is not only exhausted by an irksome labour, but he is without that interest in the composition, and that direction to his thoughts which would be produced by the expectation of speaking what is pertinent and seasonable ; and the hearer not only listens without the interest which belongs to a perception of correspondence between the discourse and the occasion, but actually comes to listen, possessed with the idea—suited above every other to cause an indolent attention—that what he is to hear may be spoken or listened to as properly at another time.

There is always, moreover, some variety in the subjects, which present themselves to the orators of the senate or the bar. The circumstances which make the matter of a debate are never twice the same, and this is a circumstance not more certain to fix the attention of those who hear, than favourable to the exercise and appearance of ability in those who speak.

They have facts unknown to the audience to produce, contested points to prove, adverse arguments to meet. These things insure an interest. A contest alone is sufficient matter for curiosity. The discourses of the pulpit, for the most part, admit only of the exhibition in a forcible and engaging manner of truths, which no one thinks of doubting; and this undertaking to make the mind feel the influence of that which it has already received, and entertains without emotion, is of all undertakings, within the compass of the art, the most discouraging, and seldome successful. Discourses on doctrinal theology make sometimes an exception, and every one knows how much most easily they are composed, and how much most attention they can command. The preacher who thinks it his duty often to treat such subjects has lightened his task, and found the readiest way to reputation.

The effect of desire of victory in debate to put the faculties in strong action is obviously very great. The prospect of accomplishing an immediate and visible object has a similar influence. In addressing a popular assembly or a jury, one has in view to produce immediately a sensible testimony to his powers. Preachers, who aim at a sudden and observable operation on their hearers, have the same advantage, and the effect appears in the character of their modes of address. It is not conceivable, that Whitfield and preachers of his class would have employed so successfully the most impassioned style of eloquence, if they aimed only at an effect, which should discover itself in the distant actions of their hearers' lives.

The character of pulpit eloquence is again most unfavourably affected by the nature of the audience. They belong to no one class, and the same address can in no way be made the best for all. The same subject is important for one to consider, and not so for another. The style which the taste of some requires is too elevated or too humble for the rest. And this difficulty applies not only nor principally to the choice of words and structure of sentences, for in these good writers please at the same time the well informed and ignorant; but to the whole course of argument or remark. What seems acute to one, another calls unintelligible; and trite and useful, as applied to sermons, some appear to think convertible terms. Some men's wills are only accessible through their feelings, others only through their understandings. They

meet in the church, and the one sort or the other will probably go away unmodified. If the first class are addressed, their prejudices are opposite, and while you have been producing a good effect on some of them, you have outraged the rest. If the latter, there is no set of premises in which they agree, and great part of your labour will thus be lost.

One other difficulty in the task of preachers deserves to be mentioned. They must not betray nor address the violent passions, the most excitable part of the constitution, and therefore that out of which the highest style of eloquence springs, and in operating on which the greatest fame may be easiest acquired. Invective comes with no grace from a religious teacher, nor is he permitted to excite any feelings except those of devotion and benevolence. This is a task exceedingly different from that of working an audience into a rage.

All these difficulties, essential to the art of preaching considered, we are not surprised at what we suppose will be allowed to be true, that there are fewer good specimens in this kind of composition than in any other, which has engaged men of equal abilities and accomplishments. The circumstance, which seems to have been felt as most embarrassing, is the tendency to triteness in the subjects and manner of discourse, and the desire of avoiding it has undoubtedly led to some of the principal faults of preachers. One would think that strict discriminating truth was necessary in nothing so much as in the representations of religious doctrines and duties. But strict truth is a dull homely thing, and eloquence requires animation and vivacity. The consequence is, that something better than reality is sought. An effect is aimed at, to be obtained by the strong lines of the picture, not by the fidelity of the likeness. Virtue is drawn in caricature; the prim stiff figure of the puritan; and truth is so arrayed, disguised with its finery, that common eyes cannot discern whether it is truth or falsehood. This is the worst effect of the ambition in preachers to be striking. But there is another more to our purpose. Doubtless a preacher's business is to consider first, what end he is to propose to himself, and then how that end will be best accomplished *with his audience*. The end of preaching is to engage men in the practice of religious duty, and this either directly by determining the will, or less so by informing the understanding. For the sake of avoiding the tedium of the old track, the very object of discourse has not

seldom been sacrificed, and that virtue wanting in the instrument, for the want of which nothing can atone, that of being adapted to its end. It is a beauty of a road to be smooth and shady, but this avails nothing to recommend it, if it does not besides this lead whither the traveller is going. And as to that consideration of the character of his audience, which one would think would be well weighed by a preacher, who meant to speak to any purpose, it is curious to observe how, for the sake of avoiding the beaten path, we must suppose, for we can conjecture no other reason, it seems to have been neglected. Origen fancied allegories, and Chrysostom polished the Greek period for the poor unlearned Christians of the third and fourth centuries; and the military heroes of the dark ages were entertained, when they had any thing in the shape of religious teaching, with the metaphysics of Aristotle and Augustin. When a better æra might be expected to have begun in England, Tillotson, of whose reputation he that can give an account is ingenious, was discoursing the veriest truisms in the loosest style in the high spiritual places of the kingdom; while the gifted Scotch were diving into the depths of foreknowledge and will, with a ragged auditory on a hill's side. The old style of English preaching was to exhibit the proofs of the divine authority and doctrines of religion to those who never doubted either, and of the French to urge the duties founded on these, on an audience who believed nothing of the matter.

However it be with the French, the English style of sermon writing exists no longer, or at least in any shape worthy of its former fame. The sermons that come over to us now are written mostly in a style to show that the rival school has triumphed. We cannot be supposed to be biassed by the execution of them, which is not often such as to excite a favourable prejudice, when we say that we think the change an indication of better taste. We know what we are hazarding when we confess, that the direct, animated address of the French preachers seems to us altogether better suited, than the didactic manner of the English, to make the hearing of sermons a profitable employment. We are very little satisfied with the plea commonly made, that the English sermons are compositions for thinking men, and have in them abundance of argument and sagacious remark. That they are compositions suited to thinking men is no praise to them as sermons; for the audiences for which sermons are prepared

are but in small part composed of such. But we go farther, and own that in our view even the advantage in argument is decidedly on the side of the French preachers, if it be any merit in an argument to be compressed, yet clear, and effectual, though unpretending. We do not value other forms of arguing more than the disgraced syllogism, and are willing to let a man convince us in the way which seems to him best, though it be without any pretence of premises and deductions. That way of reasoning is to be preferred which is best fitted to produce conviction. A preacher finds that if he would effect any thing with an audience such as he addresses, the burden of fixing and sustaining their attention devolves on himself. It is desirable that his arguments therefore be striking in form, as well as cogent in matter, and no means of making them so is to be neglected. If by grounding them on present sensible objects, or stating them in a vehement expostulation, or clothing them in rhetorical embellishments, he can urge them with best effect, it is an advantage not to be lost, and to have a quick discernment of such opportunities is so far to be skilled in the art of preaching. It seems to us that the sentence with which one of the French preachers began with his hand on the bier of a king—my friends, there is nothing great but God—had in it not only more eloquence, but more argument than any form of English words in which we have seen the same sentiment conveyed. For another example; what parade of statements and inferences would be likely to produce an effect equally powerful, or in fact would contain equally powerful reasoning, with that celebrated passage in Massillon's Sermon on the small number of the saved, in which he supposes the day of judgment already arrived, and asks his hearers who of them, if the heavens were to open that moment above them, would expect to be found among the just.

We hope we shall not be misconceived to deny the merit which the English sermons really possess, because we cannot grant that they have the highest. The strong sense, the discriminating views of duty and religious truths, the just estimates of character, and acute investigation of motive which some of them exhibit are virtues which stand clear of the defect in composition, which seem to us evident and great. Still as long as it is the object of preaching to awaken and inform the conscience, whatever is not best fitted to this end,



pleasant and improving performance as in other respects it may be, is not the best sermon. It is not enough to furnish matter of reflection for the wise. There must be something also to attract the simple, and even the wise require something more than that provision be made for them.

The prejudice against that style of pulpit eloquence which we regard as the highest is, we think, owing to the difficulty of succeeding in it. In this, as in other attempts in which success is reserved for great powers, there are fewer who succeed than fail. Those who mean that they do not like the show of eloquence without the animating spirit will meet no opposition from us. We are defending those only who are equal to what they attempt. We admit that for most public speakers plain modes of address are best, but the reason we give for it is, that the less the pretension, the less disgraceful the failure, and it is because we consider the French style of pulpit eloquence the highest, that we think few good specimens of it are likely to be exhibited.

We were going on to say when we fell upon this long digression, that a preacher in this country has other difficulties to contend with than those essential to his task. The founders of our religious institutions were persons much engaged in religious contemplations and exercises, and their spiritual guides naturally attained an influence which engaged them in arduous public duties, and were objects of a reliance and regard which caused their society to be prized and sought. The clergy were made advisers in political and civil matters as well as those of a more private nature, and the care of education was principally committed to them. They were expected to be personally acquainted with each of their charge, to be always accessible and to be always at hand when the wants or wishes of any of their charge required. The demand was a very proper one, for they who made it took wise care to enable it to be met. They remembered that their clergy to be respected and useful, must be learned as well as busy, and they allowed that study is necessary to learning, and leisure to study. They did not build thirty log-houses and a meeting-house in the midst, that they did not provide two pastors. The duty, grèat part of it has continued and on the whole vastly increased since their time. There is one congregation in this state at least composed of more than three thousand persons. The clergy are still liable to a va-

riety of public duties. They still keep up that familiar intercourse with their charge, which of itself takes up no small share of the time of one man. They are commonly active members of religious and benevolent societies. They are intrusted in a great measure with the direction of education from the university to the parish school. But while the task has continually increased, the corresponding practice has gone by degrees into disuse, and we know of scarce a parish in the commonwealth where the duty during the whole year is permanently shared between two persons.

Now it is not that the time, which is necessary to mature the preparations of a public speaker is in chief part consumed by other engagements, but yet more, that the mind is rent by such a variety of important cares, some of them too of the most exhausting kind, and incapacitated, except in very happy moments, from giving an undivided intense attention to any one. The consequence must be that something will be neglected, and much done languidly, or else in minds of peculiar excitability, an unnatural tension will be kept up for a time, which will soon however wear out the frame. If any are disposed to reply, that in such a duty no man's animation can fail, they may be reminded, what it is never worth while to forget, that earth enters into the composition of man, and that the spirits of the most conscientious will flow and ebb, their minds kindle and cool, their nerves be braced and relaxed like other beings. We have no doubt of the ability or the zeal. We but ask the question, whether the mind is constructed so as to work freely under such a pressure.

To this is to be added, that the great demand in this profession calls very young men into it. And there is no noviciate for them. There is no simultaneous growth as elsewhere of duty with improvement, but they plunge at once into the midst of their most arduous duties. Under a variety of untried embarrassments, preparation must be made for two public appearances during the week, and each week at least the thoughts be turned into an entirely different channel. The great preachers of France, except on special occasions, preached only at Christmas or in Lent, and their sermons were the slow compositions of weeks of leisure. Many of the English divines are entitled by their station to the same privilege, and very many more avail themselves of it without this right. Paley's advice to the young clergy of his diocese is, if they

find themselves unable to compose a sermon a week, to try to compose one every month ; and Dr. Doddridge says that two hundred sermons are enough for a life. No where, in fact, is the task of the clergy so great as here, and no where, but in Scotland, approaching to it. And this, too, in a country where the practice of translation has scarcely yet gained any footing.

Worse than all, the hardship of want of opportunity for close, long-continued attention is one, we fear, felt with peculiar severity by precisely those persons, from whom the public ought to hope the most. There are minds perhaps so framed, as always to perceive distinctly at a first glance. But in general we suppose the views of a profound and original thinker present themselves dimly at first, and only come to be well defined in the thoughts after a close observation. Give a man of this character time to trace his hint, to follow it into its consequences, and make it familiar in short to his own view, he will exhibit it in the clearest light to others. But hasten him, he will either give you his really valuable thoughts in the rude obscure state in which they as yet exist, in his own mind, or else views as trite as you would have from other men, and offered in a still less tolerable dress, because he is not used to triteness and is impatient of it. The best intellectual mechanism that ever was put together, if you will not wait its movements, will either turn out half formed ideas, or the old hackneyed ones in the same shape in which it received them.

No more need be said to show, that the life of the clergy is with us more an active than a studious life, and that it would be matter of surprize if their productions should often bear the marks of that laborious correction, which a literary leisure admits. But there are not many evils without a balance. Every occupation with us, even the most retired of the professions, is made a school of that practical talent which distinguishes the character of our country. The avocations which take a clergyman from his books, lead him into the world of men, and force him to an acquaintance with the condition, characters, opinions, and needs of those whom he must address. They make him a student of men and life. He finds a salutary exercise to his powers, in intercourse with men of different pursuits, and gains influence, if he deserve it, by contributing his opinions on equal ground with them, on subjects of common interest. More than all, he brings to the

aid of his other motives to diligence and earnestness the force of personal attachment, which breathes into his addresses that tone of sincerity and feeling, which cannot be counterfeited, which can scarcely be dispensed with, and which can neutralize almost every fault. To these causes it is owing, that scarcely any foreign sermons, which we read, compare with many which we hear, for directness and closeness of application, and we are pleased to learn from those of our friends who have had means of judging, that the standard of preaching is no where higher than with us.

We do not forget that we are to remark on the writings of one who furnishes the most signal example of a victory over those unfavourable circumstances in the situation of our clergy, which seem to condemn them, like the rest of our professional men, to a practical, scanty, superficial learning. That Mr. Buckminster was thus distinguished, that it is not only as a preacher that he has been known, and been useful, was owing to no exemption from the common duties of a laborious profession, but to advantages wholly personal. He possessed very uncommon qualities of mind, and, what is more, in a singularly happy combination. A full and just account of his intellectual character and habits has been given by the lamented author of the very interesting biography prefixed to the volume of his sermons, and there is nothing which we could add to it. The trait which perhaps will be remarked as the most uncommon, is the union of such inventive powers, as he possessed, with such powers and taste for study. Minds fertile in their own resources are often impatient of the labour of appropriating to themselves the thoughts of other minds, and fall of course into the eccentricities, which nothing will keep in check, except a regard to that compromise of opposite judgments, and result of the common judgment, which is called good taste. And on the other hand, men, who have indulged themselves in that comparative indolence of the mind when it is receiving ideas from another, not only have its original bent restrained by culture, but are apt to contract a dread of the severe effort of invention. When neither consequence appears, the most eminent and useful men are formed, and one of these was the author of this volume. His ardent love of learning discovered itself at the earliest period, when the mind shows its tastes, and to the extent that the constant calls of professional duty admitted, he was always, even in the

more active years of his life, a laborious student. He had the benefit of the best opportunities of education, which our country furnished. He pursued his preparatory studies at the excellent classical school in Exeter, N. H. under the care of Dr. Abbot, his academical at Cambridge, and passed four years of close application afterwards in professional preparation. For an account of his favourite pursuits we refer to his biography, and for the rank which he held in our world of letters, we give the authority of one of the very few who, on such a question, are authorized to pronounce an opinion. ‘There is no question,’ says the editor of the *Repository*,\* ‘that he was one of the most eminent men, whom our country has ever produced. In my opinion he was far beyond all rivalry the most eminent literary man of all those of whom she retains only the memory.’

He came forward into life with the marks of eminence and usefulness upon him. In any sphere they must have been his destiny. It could not have been but that in any sphere he would have been one of those who give a direction to the views, and a character to the history of the society in which they live. In fact, this volume, which is the proof of what he was as a preacher, fills but a very small part of our recollection of him. We look at it as Michael Angelo did at the famous fragment of antiquity. It is but a part, but it tells what the whole was. His influence as a preacher will be far beyond his life; nay, infinitely far beyond the term of any life. But it is not in this character that he will be most conspicuous in the history of our country. His success and countenance gave an impulse to literature among us, which, every year since he first became the boast and wonder of our little literary republic here, has been increasing, and of which our country will in time acknowledge the debt. Had he had less love of letters and less learning, the enthusiasm which he excited would have been a mere personal tribute, and perished with him; and had he possessed fewer of those qualities which set a mark on all that he did and loved, the hopes of learning would have owed him less.

When we say then that Mr. Buckminster was the author of what upon the whole we account the best specimens in our language of a difficult kind of composition, we speak but a small part of his praise. Yet as a preacher it is that he must

\* Vol. ii. p. 306.

become known to those who knew him not, and the profession of his choice was that for which nature and circumstances had formed him. In any he would have gained a fame and an influence, but in any other than this part of them would have been lost. In the family of his venerable father, the most distinguished among the clergy of a neighbouring state he took the bias which determined his life as early perhaps as any predilection develops itself, and which gave a direction and a colour to all his subsequent pursuits and views. Had he lived a mere scholar's life, he would have produced indeed what would have been admired and useful, but the power of the orator would have been unfelt. His imagination, wonderfully fertile and well governed as it was, marked him for that province of eloquence which must elevate the ideas of the intellectual, and aid the conceptions of the humble. The unrivalled power of attaching which he possessed, would not have been in any other sphere of public life so important an auxiliary to his other means of being useful, and we shall not be misapprehended when we say, that his exquisite perception of moral excellence and the worth and attraction of his own character would in no other sphere of action have benefitted the public so much as in the sacred office.

The volume before us contains as we have said the best sermons of which we have any knowledge. They are written in a style of the most polished elegance, and if they seem best fitted for the more cultivated class of hearers (for such would naturally be selected for publication) yet they are brought down by the clear well-defined current of thought, to the comprehension of the humble. There is nothing in them of the bad taste of excessive ornament. You see in them indeed the fruits of an imagination familiar with all forms of grandeur and beauty, and abounding too in classical resources, for he had drunk deep at the fountains of antiquity, and drawn thence the living spirit. But there is no noisy, useless torrent of imagery. They show an intimate knowledge of character; a delicate discrimination of duty; a strict fidelity to truth, and independent uncompromising assertion of it. They breathe above all an enthusiastic, contagious love of religious goodness, and he who can read them without feeling the ardour of virtue kindle in him, has not it seems to us an imagination to be raised nor a heart to be warmed. The biography of the author notices as a peculiarity of his manners a cer-

tain directness and absence of disguise. It appears in these writings. They speak impressive truths as they should be spoken, in solemn, direct, impressive, fearless language. They are what sermons ought to be, perspicuous expositions of religious truth, animated representations of the excellence and happiness, and hopes of the religious life, and direct appeals to the conscience.

When we began this article, we fully designed to give a discriminating character, as far as we were able, of this volume, to defend the opinion we entertain of it, and as became us in our official capacity, to find or pretend to find its faults. Our readers must pardon us that, as at last we have discovered we cannot accomplish our design. We did not imagine, till we attempted it, the difficulty of talking in set phrases of criticism of one surrounded with a glory in our minds, which will not let us see his faults, nor even take the proportions of his merit. We should better have left the task of doing both to those who never knew or heard him. When they have assigned to this volume the rank which it may be thought to hold among productions of the kind, they may remember in aid of their estimation of its author, that it is the posthumous work of one who in his minority was engaged in the duties of an arduous public station, and died on the threshold of mature life. They may be told too that when they have imagined what effect such a speaker might produce, their imagination, we must believe, falls far from what is in the memory of us who witnessed it. Part of the art of the orator dies irrecoverably with him. It is a narrow estimate of intellectual power which recognizes it in one of its ways of exhibition. The high fancy that illuminates the profound path of thought, irradiates the speaking eye. The keen feeling that indites the pathetic sentence, tunes the melting voice. But there are no marks to perpetuate these, no musical scale to preserve the subduing tone of deep emotion; no living likeness of the heaven-illuminated face, caught in moments of religious inspiration. These are lost; but they who have seen or can fancy the effect of the most solemn and encouraging truths, conveyed in their most striking and engaging shape, pronounced with the tones which know their way from heart to heart, by one whose idea was almost identified with whatever is to be admired and loved, will be able to conceive something of our recollections of Mr. Buckminster.